



The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (Modern Library Classics)

Victor Hugo

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The story and characters in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* have resonated with succeeding generations since its publication in 1831. It has tempted filmmakers, and most recently animators, who have exploited its dramatic content to good effect but have inevitably lost some of the grays that make the original text so compelling.

From Victor Hugo's flamboyant imagination came Quasimodo, the grotesque bell ringer; La Esmeralda, the sensuous gypsy dancer; and the haunted archdeacon Claude Frollo. Hugo set his epic tale in the Paris of 1482 under Louis XI and meticulously re-created the day-to-day life of its highest and lowest inhabitants. Written at a time of perennial political upheaval in France, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* is the product of an emerging democratic sensibility and prefigures the teeming masterpiece *Les Misérables*, which Hugo would write thirty years later.

He made the cathedral the centerpiece of the novel and called it *Notre-Dame de Paris*. (It received its popular English title at the time of its second translation in 1833.) Hugo wrote that his inspiration came from a carving of the word "fatality" in Greek that he had found in the cathedral. The inscription had been eradicated by the time the book was published, and Hugo feared that *Notre-Dame's* Gothic splendor might soon be lost to the contemporary fad for tearing down old buildings. *Notre-Dame* has survived as one of the great monuments of Paris, and Hugo's novel is a fitting celebration of it, a popular classic that is proving to be just as enduring.

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Jacket paintings: (front) detail from *Notre Dame* by Paul Lecomte, courtesy of David David Gallery/SuperStock; (spine) *Victor Hugo, 1833*, by Louis Boulanger of Giraudon/Art Resource, N.Y.

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